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SUBJECT: ALLAWI AND BARZANI DISCUSS POLITICAL ALLIANCE

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Daniel V. Speckhard for reasons 1.4 (a) and (b)

¶1. (C) Summary: The Ambassador and Iraqiyya leaders Ayad Allawi and Adnan Pachachi visited Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) President Massoud Barzani in Barzan from March 1-3. The leaders discussed a possible political alliance to push forward on key reforms critical to establishing security in Iraq, including de-Ba'athification. The conversation continued March 4 with Deputy PM Barham Salih in Dokan. Barzani promised his 55 Council of Representatives (CoR) seats would join Iraqiyya in support of a de-Ba'athification law and he offered to host a two-day meeting in Erbil to sequester the leaders of the GOI blocs in order to agree on an action plan for the future of Iraq. The group doubted, however that PM Maliki and SCIRI leader Abulaziz al-Hakim would agree to participate. Both Barzani and Salih strategized with Allawi on how the Kurdish parties might work with Iraqiyya to elicit necessary action from the Shiite UIA-dominated government. (Note: Discussion on possible Iraqiyya withdrawal from the GOI reported septel.) End summary.

Moving De-Ba'athification in the CoR

¶2. (C) The Ambassador raised the importance of building on the success of the hydrocarbons law by reaching agreement on another key political benchmark -- de-Ba'athification reform.

Ambassador briefed the leaders on his current effort to press SCIRI VP Abdel Mehdi to agree to the current de-Ba'athification draft law in order for the Presidency to present it to the Cabinet. The leaders also discussed the possibility of introducing the draft law in the Council of Representatives (CoR), should Abdel Mehdi not support the law. Allawi said Iraqiyya had submitted a letter to the CoR calling for action on de-Ba'athification, and that the Barzani's KDP bloc, while supportive, had not agreed to sign the letter pending the PUK's decision, which was on hold due to the PUK's desire not to upset its alliance with the UIA. Barzani said he was unaware of this, and maintained that KDP CoR members took their marching orders from him, not Talibani. Barzani promised that the Kurdish Alliance's 55 seats would join Iraqiyya in a bid to push a de-Ba'athification reform law through the CoR.

¶3. (C) On March 4 the discussion continued with Deputy PM Barham Salih in Dokan. Salih held that Abdel Mehdi would be unable to agree to support the draft de-Ba'athification law in the Presidency, but would give tacit approval to action in the CoR if an agreement is not reached by the Presidency. Salih said it would be possible to build a majority CoR coalition with the Kurdish parties in favor of the law, but that it would require both U.S. activism and some defecting UIA members to succeed; he suggested the U.S. pressure the Kurds to join in this effort, "We will do it if the U.S. asks us," said Salih.

¶4. (C) The Ambassador pointed out that while Iraqiyya was strong on vision, it lacked a practical plan to do the ground work necessary to organize politically to achieve their goal; he suggested the leadership select a "whip" from its CoR who would be capable of building the coalition, organizing the votes and maintaining discipline, including within Iraqiyya.

Barzani Proposes Future of Iraq Meeting in Erbil

¶5. (C) Allawi and Barzani agreed that the GOI has failed as a government of national unity and encouraged sectarianism. Allawi criticized PM Maliki for not taking the necessary political action to support the Baghdad Security Plan, saying the point is to create the space for political reconciliation and warning that this opportunity should not be squandered. Without action on the key reform issue of de-Ba'athification, militias, and the old army, said the former PM, security will not be achieved despite the BSP. Allawi called for increased U.S. pressure on the PM to fulfill the agreed upon political benchmarks.

¶6. (C) Pointing out that Iraqi leaders have not come together in one forum to discuss Iraq's future since the 2003 liberation, Barzani proposed hosting a meeting of leaders of the GOI blocs to decide on a common way forward for the future of the country. He suggested a two-day meeting in Erbil, away from the "distractions of Baghdad." Allawi agreed that the meeting would be a good idea, but only if it was attended by the decision-makers who could carry their blocs.

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¶7. (C) The leaders agreed that only a small number of senior figures should be invited: al-Hakim and PM Maliki representing the Shia alliance, VP Tariq al-Hashimi plus one for Tawafiq, KDP and PUK leaders Barzani and Deputy PM Salih, and Allawi for Iraqiyya. Barzani spoke to SCIRI VP Abdul Mehdi by phone, who agreed the concept was a good one and said he would wait to hear the details. After discussing the possible logistics and agenda of the potential meeting, Allawi and Barzani concluded that al-Hakim, and possibly PM Maliki, would refuse to attend. Despite their doubts, they agreed to reach out separately to the SCIRI chief and the Prime Minister to press the idea.

Need to Separate to Unite

¶8. (C) President Barzani's son Masroud joined the discussions, contending that a period of decentralization was required for an eventually-unified Iraq. Iraq would not be broken up under this scenario, he said, there would be a central government in Baghdad, but the communities needed to be kept apart from each other, each responsible for their own security and local government, in order to create the political space for coming back together. Salih later echoed this same sentiment, saying temporary separation was necessary to end the Sunni-Shia civil war. Allawi disagreed, asking whether federalism would not just make the sectarian crisis worse by magnifying the problems.

New Kurdish-Tawafiq-Iraqiyya Alliance - Price is Kirkuk

¶9. (C) The Ambassador pressed the leaders to work together to support PM Maliki implement the BSP, pointing out that recent operations are targeting all violent elements regardless of sect. Allawi supported Maliki's stabilization efforts, but complained that the GOI behaved like a majority government, encouraging secularism and failing to make progress on

reconciliation issues critical to Iraq's future. The former PM was particularly critical of the Ministry of Interior, saying that the Iraqi people had no confidence in the internal security apparatus and claiming that eighty percent of the police needed to be cleansed of militia infiltration.

¶10. (C) DPM Salih said that the Shia alliance is playing a clever game, taking control of the security agencies and economic institutions so as to eventually eliminate the other blocs from GOI. He pointed to major decision making in the 'dishdasha' cabinet, leaving the other parties out in the cold. Allawi, who has repeatedly complained about Iraqiyya's marginalization within the GOI, agreed, contending that despite its five ministries the party has been excluded from all bodies responsible for issues critical to the future of Iraq. Salih echoed Allawi in calling for a 'rebalancing' in the Iraqi political arena, "or in two years we will have the Islamic Republic of Iraq. We need to be part of the government or withdraw."

¶11. (C) Pointing to Iraqiyya, Salih said that liberal agenda in Iraq was weak, but if it joined with the Kurds and Sunnis a rebalancing of political forces could be achieved. Allawi said that any new majority bloc should be issues based, not sectarian. To break from UIA and ally with Tawafuq, Salih said, the Kurds need to feel that are part of the game. Resolution of Kirkuk would be a catalyst for bringing in the Kurds. Tawafuq DPM al-Hashimi agrees that the Kurds are crucial, Salih reported, but Tawafuq is not willing to give on Kirkuk. Kurdish cooperation on a new bloc would be conditional on agreement on Kirkuk, Salih said, reminding Allawi and Pachachi, "without us you cannot perform this rebalancing."

SPECKHARD